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HELPING TEACHERS IN SERVICE

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In an effort to improve the geography work in some of the city schools of Iowa, the Extension Division of the Iowa State Teachers College has, during the past winter quarter, sent out a member of the faculty to do what may be termed consultation work in that subject. Although a comparatively new undertaking here, it seems from present indications to be an effective method of helping the teachers bring their instruction in geography to a little higher standard.

One who is a specialist in geography and who is putting his whole time and thought on that science naturally has a very different view of the subject as a whole and the ends to be gained from its study than has one who deals with it merely in a single grade and then repeats the same subject-matter the next year. A teacher in the grades can spend at best not more than one-eighth of her preparation time each week on this branch; hence any help which will enable her to use this short time more efficiently is in most cases very welcome. Many city superintendents are so busy with the executive duties of the school that they have little time to outline a detailed course of study in all subjects even if they had the expert knowledge along all lines to enable them to do so. Therefore, most of them are glad to have the suggestions which have come after a study of the geography-teaching in their schools.

The plan used was as follows: A member of the geography faculty who was taking a term off from regular instructional work in the college spent two to three days in any town whose superintendent had expressed a wish for help. The first day the instructor spent most profitably in visiting classes, obtaining, when possible, two cross sections of the geography work of the city from two different buildings. At most places the city superintendent notified the principal of a building that the instructor was coming and the program for the half-day was so arranged, or disarranged, that classes in geography were heard at every period. The whole visit was much more effective where the superintendent visited the

classes at the same time. In the general meetings with the teachers, he was then in a position to understand more fully the points which were raised in the discussions, to appreciate the questions asked by his teachers, and to decide the justice of criticisms which were made.

At the close of the first day, usually at half-past three in the afternoon, the teachers met for a conference. The most helpful work of all was done at this meeting. The general aim of geography-teaching was presented, and questions which the teachers brought up were discussed. One theme was necessary everywhere, and that was the use of the globe and the map. A discussion of the problem method was usually requested. No criticisms of individual teachers were made at any place, as that was not the purpose of the consultation, although practically everywhere teachers were very free in asking to have faults in their teaching pointed out. The second day's work varied widely in the different cities. In one of the largest school systems all teachers of geography dismissed their rooms and met at eleven o'clock to see a demonstration lesson with a seventh grade. In the afternoon, two hours were spent in going over the city course of study with the superintendent. At half-past three the teachers all met again for conference. This superintendent and his corps of teachers were most gratifying in their eagerness for help and in their appreciation of suggestions.

At another place the second day was spent in demonstration teaching in the various buildings, four or five teachers coming in to watch each of the classes. At half-past three a class was taught in a central building before all the geography teachers of the town. At still another place conferences were held on Saturday.

After carrying this work farther and waiting for some time to elapse so that the teachers visited may have opportunity to make use of the suggestions given, one will be in a position to judge of the permanent value of the plan. A few general observations even at this date may not be out of place.

One defect in geography-teaching has been evident everywhere—we introduce the map too soon, do not teach its use thoroughly enough, and then do not use it effectively in the grades which follow. The writer is convinced that when the map is introduced too soon the child's sense of real direction is not developed as it might be, and he is handicapped by this lack of development in all the geography work for the years to come. For example: The

fourth grade, first half-year, is to study Iowa; therefore the map of Iowa is hung up in the room and the children begin their mapwork by pointing to the Mississippi and the Missouri rivers, Illinois, Minnesota, and other boundaries. This is purely memory work as you can prove by asking a few questions. Why not at this stage omit the map and point in the actual direction of these various features? To be able to point out the Mississippi on the map is no evidence that a child has any notion of the direction in which it lies from his schoolroom. It is a mistake to introduce the child to a map of the state until he is familiar with the map of North America and can read maps easily.

Not everyone will agree with this, we know. Still the arguments which can be presented must have some weight. The pupil does not really need the map until the latter part of the fourth year or the beginning of the fifth. Then the globe should be taught before the map. If this is done properly and thoroughly, we shall do away with the old error, "up north and down south," as north and south will be connected in the child's mind with the poles. If he is taught to go south on the globe by following a meridian away from the north pole, he will soon realize for himself that to go south on the map does not necessarily mean to go toward the bottom of the page. One needs but take an average sixth grade and ask the members to prove from their maps the direction in which the Niagara River flows to realize how deeply "bottom and top of map" has sunk in.

If the teaching of the globe is followed by the use of the physical map of North America, and the symbols and directions the class has just learned are transferred to this, the work is simple. If following the ordinary textbooks, the class is ready to take up the study of North America in Book I, a great deal of this work may be done in connection with the map-teaching so that no time need be lost. The big features of coast-line, the location of highlands and lowlands, of river basins, and river directions may all be brought out, while the main purpose to teach the pupils to read a map intelligently will be accomplished.